

# Cultivating Interdisciplinary Foreign Language Talents Through Interdisciplinary Synergy of On-campus Teaching and Off-campus Practices Under the New Liberal Arts

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## Abstract

In the AI era, with big data, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek, single-disciplinary foreign language graduates face declining advantages as AI automates language services, exacerbating employment challenges for the students. Thus, interdisciplinary training of foreign language majors has become quite essential. Although proposed in China for years and advanced by new liberal arts education, existing models fail to effectively integrate theory and practice. Against this backdrop, this article, guided by the principles of the new liberal arts, explores how to cultivate interdisciplinary foreign language talents by constructing a linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices. This model tightly integrates in-class, knowledge-oriented teaching of foreign languages with other professional fields on campus, after-class project design that merges professional knowledge with societal needs, and off-campus project implementation. Therefore, this “classroom-to-society” approach can strengthen both linguistic skills and cross-disciplinary abilities of the students, offering a practical framework for high-standard foreign language education in the AI-driven era.

## Keywords

New liberal arts; linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices; interdisciplinary foreign language talents; interdisciplinary competencies

## 1. Introduction

On November 3, 2020, the Ministry of Education of China issued the Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts, which made comprehensive plans for the construction of new liberal arts. It requires that liberal arts education accelerate its innovative development. The construction of new liberal arts highlights interdisciplinary integration, emphasizing the in-depth penetration among multiple disciplines within the humanities and social sciences to promote the renewal and upgrading of traditional liberal arts by shifting from a discipline-oriented approach to a demand-driven one, and from professional segmentation to interdisciplinary integration (Tian & Jia, 2020). It can be seen that the core of new liberal arts construction lies in interdisciplinary integration and a demand-driven approach, with its training goal of cultivating professional talents who can serve the country and contribute

to society (Gu, 2022). In this context, the cultivation of foreign language talent should also follow this orientation to regain vitality in the new era.

In the era of the rapid development of artificial intelligence, such as big data, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek, foreign language majors with a single-disciplinary background are gradually losing their unique advantages in serving society. To a large extent, the functional roles traditionally performed by foreign language professionals-particularly in language services-have increasingly been automated by artificial intelligence, thereby exacerbating the employment challenges confronting foreign language graduates in recent years. Against this backdrop, the cultivation of interdisciplinary foreign language talents is bound to become a general trend.

## 2. Current Landscape of Interdisciplinary Foreign Language Talent Cultivation

Interdisciplinary foreign language talents refer to individuals who demonstrate bilingual proficiency alongside disciplinary expertise in a complementary field (Wang & Song, 2021). This interdisciplinary competence is predominantly cultivated through the “foreign language + X” educational model.

Before the concept of the new liberal arts was put forward, a large number of specialized colleges and universities in China had already carried out the practice of cultivating “foreign language + X” interdisciplinary talents by combining the disciplinary background of their respective schools. For example, business and trade universities have implemented the model of “foreign language + international trade”, law schools have adopted the approach of “foreign language + law”, and medical colleges have explored the combination of “foreign language + medicine”.

After the release of the construction plan for the new liberal arts, more universities in China have started to actively explore and practice the interdisciplinary integration of foreign languages with other disciplines based on their own characteristics. For instance, the China Foreign Affairs University has integrated several of its advantageous programs, such as foreign languages, law, and diplomacy. Dalian Maritime University has formed a high-end composite talent cultivation model of “foreign language + maritime affairs”. Beijing Sport University has actively implemented the “foreign language + sports” talent cultivation path to train composite talents who are proficient in both foreign languages and sports.

Although the “foreign language + X” programs have demonstrated some progress, significant deficiencies persist in their implementation and outcomes. For example, in the current curriculum system, there is a lack of a close connection between foreign language courses and other professional courses, which makes it difficult for students to integrate the relevant knowledge. Moreover, during the teaching process, most courses focus on theory while neglecting practical application. Furthermore, there is a shortage of project-based practice or interdisciplinary projects, especially for those generalist universities that have limited access to off-campus industry platforms for practical application. Superficial integration, such as offering interdisciplinary courses that lack clear connections with the overall curriculum without sustained experiential learning opportunities, is unlikely to achieve meaningful cross-disciplinary synergy. The true “foreign language + X” talent development requires structured pathways that include well-designed curricula, practical training programs, and industry-academia cooperation mechanisms to link classroom theory with real-world professional practice.

Certainly, many universities and institutions are actively carrying out school-enterprise cooperation and using off-campus internships as a supplementary way for talent cultivation. However, these off-campus practices are often arranged in two ways. Either students are required to intern for several months during the winter or summer vacation, or in a specific semester in the senior year of their undergraduate studies, or they participate in short-term internships concentrated in one or two weeks during a semester. Moreover, the frequency of off-campus practice is insufficient, lacking regularity and continuity. Additionally, many schools do not have enough enterprise resources to ensure that all students have sufficient practical opportunities.

These issues highlight a fundamental inadequacy in the current “foreign language + X” model. Whether it is the integration of knowledge within the curriculum system or the effective connection between theory and practice, it has become evident that a fragmented cultivation approach is difficult to achieve the ideal output of talents. It can be said that there is still a long way to go for the construction of new liberal arts in foreign language education (He, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to explore a more comprehensive and systematic cultivation path, and the organic integration of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices can serve as a beneficial attempt.

### 3. The Linkage Mechanism of On-campus Teaching and Off-campus Practices

As previously mentioned, the practice of “foreign language + X” program faces numerous challenges, with obvious deficiencies in aspects such as the curriculum system and the integration of theory and practice. To break through these limitations, it is essential to establish a highly coordinated linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices.

#### 3.1 The Task of On-campus Teaching and Off-campus Practices

On-campus teaching involves in-class teaching and after-class activities on campus. In the classroom, the instructors systematically impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to a particular course or discipline to students in accordance with the teaching plan (Chen, 2015). As the core foundation of education and teaching, the in-class teaching follows a systematic curriculum outline and teaching plan, and conducts systematic teaching activities.

To effectively implement the “foreign language + X” program, classroom instruction must transcend the teaching of foreign language and other professional knowledge in isolation. Instead, these two components should be synergistically integrated to foster comprehensive learning outcomes.

Campus after-class activities usually include students’ daily study and life routines, community and club activities, various lectures, and competitions (Chen, 2015). However, in the framework of the “foreign language + X” program, the after-class activities should have a close link with in-class teaching, serving as an extension of it. For example, outside of the classroom, the students can design various professional projects under the guidance of instructors or tutors, making the after-class activities form an organic whole with the in-class teaching.

Off-campus practices refer to social practices that immerse students in authentic societal contexts, which can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired on campus and its application in real-world professional settings. Experiential Learning Theory, grounded in the constructivist approach, emphasizes the importance of real-world experiences in the learning process (Kong, 2021). As to what the students learn in the classroom, it cannot be denied that they can achieve deeper understanding and retention by participating in hands-on activities, reflecting on their experiences, and applying their insights to new situations (Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025). Therefore, creating the chance to make the student engage in a variety of practices related to their classroom learning can foster “a learner-centric environment that enhances motivation and engagement, making learning more relevant and applicable to real-life contexts” (Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025).

To ensure these practices transcend mere formalities, they must match the objectives of “foreign language + X” programs, which require the establishment of clear, measurable practice goals and rigorous evaluation criteria tailored to program-specific competencies. Such structured implementation, while generating valuable feedback to refine on-campus teaching methodologies and curricular design, can effectively foster the cultivation of students’ interdisciplinary competencies.

Therefore, the linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices involves the organic combination and mutual promotion of knowledge-oriented in-class teaching, after-class project planning and design that integrate professional knowledge and social needs on campus, and off-campus implementation of projects in society. The classroom is the main place for knowledge transfer, the campus provides abundant resources and a relatively stable environment for in-depth thinking, and the off-campus environment is connected to real-world social needs and industry trends. By organically integrating the activities in the different settings around the comprehensive ability of students, it is expected to break down the barriers in the existing cultivation model, enabling each link to complement and promote each other, thus forming a complete talent cultivation ecosystem. As a result, theory and practice, as well as knowledge and abilities, can develop in parallel (Li, Zhu, & Wen, 2007).

#### 3.2 Implementation Strategies and Procedures for the Linkage of On-campus Teaching and Off-campus Practices

As mentioned above, the linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices enables the extension and circulation of education from inside to outside the classroom, and from on-campus to off-campus, which can provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for cultivating interdisciplinary foreign language talents. However, to fully unleash its effectiveness, specific and feasible implementation strategies and procedures are required to ensure the linkage is not a mere juxtaposition or combination. This requires taking into account multiple complex

factors such as the renewal of educational concepts, the redesign of curricula, the integration and optimization of teaching resources, and the collaborative cooperation among multiple stakeholders.

### 3.2.1 Determining the Interdisciplinary Fields

When cultivating interdisciplinary foreign language talents, the first step is to determine the other field besides foreign languages. For universities with distinct professional characteristics, it is a natural choice to combine foreign languages with programs that match the school's specialties. For example, business and trade universities can offer "foreign language + international trade" program, law schools "foreign language + law", medical colleges "foreign language + medicine", and sports colleges "foreign language + sports".

However, for comprehensive universities with less distinct professional characteristics, special consideration should be given to the current national needs and the feasibility of the program. Foreign language education has always been closely related to the needs of the times (Zhen & Jiang, 2025), and the cultivation of foreign language talents should serve national strategic development. In addition, the actual needs of the country also prompt us to think about how foreign language education can serve local economic development (Zhen & Jiang, 2025).

Therefore, the School of Foreign Languages in comprehensive universities can focus on these two aspects when setting interdisciplinary fields and developing corresponding courses. In particular, local universities can give full play to their regional characteristics. They can combine foreign language teaching with local culture, history, and society, carry out interdisciplinary integration in a well-planned way, and explore academic intersections and synergies with other programs based on their teaching advantages (Gu, 2022). For example, arts and humanities universities or institutions can consider programs like "foreign language + cultural tourism" and "foreign language + film and television media".

### 3.2.2 Reforming the In-class Teaching

To truly cultivate interdisciplinary foreign language talents, the proportion of foreign language courses and non-language courses, as well as the semester of the courses, should be meticulously designed. Generally speaking, foreign language courses should account for an appropriate proportion of the total courses to ensure that students can acquire proficiency in foreign languages. In addition, the non-language courses should be offered simultaneously so that students can start integrating interdisciplinary knowledge into their language learning as early as possible. Moreover, as educational practices and review studies have clarified that interdisciplinarity primarily involves interactions between different fields of expertise, necessitating a certain level of integration among these fields to be considered truly interdisciplinary (Li et al., 2025; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020), the key to cultivating interdisciplinary foreign language talents at the in-class level is to integrate foreign language training with other subject fields, which can be achieved by a systematic design of foreign language courses.

In the "foreign language + X" program, the design of foreign language courses should transcend the conventional framework and move beyond the sole focus on isolated linguistic skills. Given that college students typically possess a foundational level of foreign language proficiency upon entering university, and with the rapid advancements in big data and artificial intelligence technologies, they have unprecedented access to self-directed learning resources and tools to enhance their foreign language proficiency. Therefore, there is an urgent need to innovate both the content and methodologies of classroom instruction.

Taking the "English + cultural tourism" program as an example, we can reform core courses such as basic English, reading, listening, and speaking, as well as translation, by incorporating a wide range of English professional articles, cases, and materials in the field of cultural tourism into these courses. This allows students to come into contact with the latest developments and practical applications of the industry while learning a foreign language. For instance, in reading classes, English materials in the field of cultural tourism can be selected, including introductions to tourist attractions, descriptions of cultural relics from all over the world, research reports on the development trends of the cultural tourism industry, academic papers on tourism marketing strategies, and papers on cultural heritage protection. Representative promotional materials, travel guides, and tourist reviews can also be used. This enables students to understand the actual operation and market demand of the cultural tourism industry while learning English.

In listening and speaking classes, students can watch and discuss English documentaries and cultural tourism promotional videos introducing famous scenic spots and cultural customs from all over the world, as well as radio programs and travel interview programs. Such materials allow students to stay informed about the latest

developments and hot topics in the cultural tourism industry while training their listening and speaking skills.

In addition, elective courses such as intercultural communication can also be adjusted accordingly, placing emphasis on analyzing and simulating cross-cultural tourism cases. For example, some cases of tourism disputes resulting from cultural differences can be selected, such as misunderstandings arising from foreign tourists' lack of understanding of the customs in the target country during their travels, or embarrassing situations encountered by tourists abroad due to cultural differences. At the same time, materials on cultural tourism customs, religious beliefs, and values in different countries and regions can be supplemented to help students understand cultural differences and travel taboos around the world. Some simulated scenarios for cross-cultural tourism, such as role-play scripts and group discussion topics, can also be introduced to allow students to practice their cross-cultural communication skills in simulated practical situations.

This teaching method integrating language knowledge with professional knowledge can not only help cultivate students' basic foreign language competencies (such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating) but also enable them to better adapt to the work requirements of specific fields. For example, in the "English + cultural tourism" program, students will be able to skillfully use English to design cultural tourism promotional copy and understand the procedures and formalities related to transnational tourism. In this way, the in-class teaching can also be well connected with and lay a foundation for the after-class activities and off-campus practices.

### 3.2.3 Innovating the Forms and Contents of After-class Activities on Campus

Currently, after-class activities for foreign language majors in most universities primarily revolve around diverse clubs and foreign language contests. However, these activities are not universally accessible to all students and frequently exhibit a lack of close alignment with the interdisciplinary program. To fully harness the potential of extracurricular activities within the interdisciplinary framework, there is an urgent need to innovate and reform both their forms and content.

Against this backdrop, adopting the dual-tutor system to carry out project design and planning activities has emerged as a viable option, as multiple instructors can enrich a student's learning experience through diversity exposure and multiple points of view (Jacob, 2015). Under this arrangement, students are assigned two tutors: one is a foreign language instructor tasked with enhancing their language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills, while the other is a subject matter expert or industry professional responsible for guiding their acquisition of specialized knowledge and practical competencies.

Based on the foreign language and non-foreign language courses, students can, under the guidance of tutors, plan and design a series of practical projects. For instance, by combining international trade courses with foreign language courses, a simulation project for international business negotiation can be designed. Through the use of new media platforms to recreate business negotiation scenarios, students can enhance their cross-cultural communication skills and business negotiation abilities in a practical setting. Similarly, by integrating cultural industry management courses with foreign language courses, a cultural product promotion project can be devised. By creating videos of cultural products on new media platforms, students can improve both their interdisciplinary skills and foreign language proficiency. However, whether these projects are feasible needs to be tested through the off-campus implementation in the real social and industrial settings.

### 3.2.4 Implementing Off-campus Projects

It is often stated that to make sure that the learners gain the required knowledge and get the factual training, it is equally important to give them time to develop their ability to use their knowledge and apply those skills in real-world situations to resolve problems that are relevant to their careers (Huang & Jiang, 2020). Therefore, encouraging the students to engage in off-campus projects is a valuable strategy to apply what they have learned on campus in real-world situations.

At present, numerous colleges and universities actively collaborate with enterprises and have established a variety of enterprise internship bases with the aim of enhancing students' practical abilities. However, there remain significant deficiencies in the actual operation of these programs. Firstly, the number of enterprises contacted by schools is relatively limited, and the internship positions provided by these enterprises often lack pertinence. As a result, it is difficult for these positions to be closely integrated with students' interdisciplinary programs. Consequently, students often cannot access practical work that is closely related to their field during their internships. Secondly, students usually lack clear internship goals and plans before embarking on their internships. Due to the lack of



targeted internship positions and guidance, many students find themselves engaged in trivial tasks such as document sorting and daily reception. These tasks bear little relevance to their professional studies and future career development, thus having little impact on improving their professional abilities. In addition, as previously mentioned, in the current school-enterprise cooperation model, students' off-campus practices have not been normalized and lack continuity.

Therefore, to fully implement off-campus activities, it is essential to base them on clear objectives and engage in diverse projects, collaborating with relevant enterprises and institutions. For instance, the university can collaborate with educational and training institutions to create foreign language courses focused on traditional skills-including traditional musical instruments, calligraphy, painting, martial arts, tea art, and other local crafts-for international audiences; cooperation can also be made with travel agencies and museums to produce short videos introducing tourist attractions and museums in foreign languages; the students can work with outward-looking enterprises to create free foreign language videos showcasing their products and companies to aid in overseas promotion; they can also join forces with village committees, emulating the successful example of Li Ziqi, to produce short videos in foreign languages about rural life and traditional farming customs to disseminate traditional agricultural culture. In these off-campus practical activities, students are not merely language translators. Instead, they can leverage their foreign language skills and understanding of foreign cultures and audiences to execute industrial projects more efficiently. By integrating their knowledge from other fields such as traditional skills and crafts, tourism, marketing, and cultural communication, they are given the chance to engage comprehensively in various social and industrial initiatives. Throughout this process, their "foreign language + X" comprehensive abilities can be thoroughly showcased and evaluated. Upon completing each project, they can also acquire a profound sense of accomplishment, significantly boosting their learning motivation and enthusiasm. Simultaneously, their career prospects are expected to be expanded, and their awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship may be strengthened, potentially giving rise to more innovation and entrepreneurship ventures.

#### 4. Conclusion

Although the concept of cultivating interdisciplinary foreign language talents in China has been proposed for many years and has received more attention since the proposal of the new liberal arts construction, the existing models still have many limitations. They cannot fully and deeply meet the requirements of the goals of interdisciplinary talent cultivation. Under the concept of new liberal arts, constructing a linkage mechanism of on-campus teaching and off-campus practices, clarifying training goals, reforming the curriculum, exploring the forms and contents of off-class activities, and carrying out off-campus practical activities can more effectively cultivate interdisciplinary foreign language talents. In the classroom, knowledge-oriented teaching of "foreign language + X" is conducted. After class, exploration is carried out into project planning and design that integrates professional knowledge with social needs. Additionally, off-campus practices are organically combined and mutually promoted. Extending from inside the classroom to outside the classroom, from on-campus to off-campus, this model can help achieve a close connection between the learning of basic theoretical knowledge of "foreign language + X" and practical application, integrate and strengthen students' foreign language proficiency and other professional abilities in multiple aspects, and improve students' learning effects, thus achieving the high-standard goal of foreign language education in the new era.

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